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Nicaraguan, in Washington, Says He Was Tortured by Sandinistas

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 23 — Prudencio Baltodano wears a white cloth over his ears to cover scars that he said remain from being tortured by Nicaraguan Army forces in February.

Mr. Baltodano, who says he was a Pentecostal preacher and farmer in El Tendido near the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua when he was attacked, came to Washington recently under the sponsorship of Nicaraguan rebels to tell his story of torture to Congress, the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

Mr. Baltodano is the latest Nicaraguan or Salvadoran to come to Washington under the auspices of an organization either favoring or opposing United States policy in Central America, to bear witness to atrocities said to have been committed by government forces or rebels in the region. The goal of these visits is to try to influence public and Congressional sentiment about Central America.

Last year, several Nicaraguans who said they had been mistreated by United States-supported rebels were brought to Washington by opponents of United States covert activities and were made available to reporters for interviews.

Wants to Testify

Mr. Baltodano said in an interview that he wants to testify about repression in his homeland, and about how one of his ears was cut off and he was bayoneted in the neck for no apparent reason other than his religious beliefs.

A spokesman for the Nicaraguan Embassy, Isolda Hurtado, said that the Government had no knowledge of Mr. Baltodano or of the attack he described. "It is another story made up by the contras to discredit Nicaragua," she said, referring to the Nicaraguan rebel forces by the name under which they are known in Central America.

The Nicaraguan Permanent Commission on Human Rights has interviewed Mr. Baltodano and considers

his story authentic, according to Marta Patricio Baltodano, the commission's national coordinator.

Mrs. Baltodano, who is no relation to Mr. Baltodano, said by telephone from Managua that the commission expects to present his case to the Nicaraguan Government this week.

Miss Hurtado, the embassy spokesman, said the commission had no legal standing as a human rights organization. She said the legitimate human rights organization in Nicaragua is the National Commission to Promote and Protect Human Rights.

Abuses Are Alleged

Roberto Ferrey, a spokesman for a Nicaraguan rebel group based in Costa Rica, said that the treatment of Mr. Baltodano was a reflection of abuses by Government forces against religious leaders and Miskito Indians in Nicaragua. Mr. Ferrey, who came with Mr. Baltodano to Washington from Costa Rica, said his rebel organization, the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, was paying for the visit to publicize the Sandinista Government's misdeeds.

Reagan Administration officials and leaders of the alliance have said the organization is supported in part by the Central Intelligence Agency. Guerrilla leaders in Costa Rica said last week that this aid has included cash. It was not clear whether money provided by the C.I.A. was used to bring Mr. Baltodano to Washington.

Tied to a Tree

Mr. Baltodano, whose scars on his forehead and neck and no left ear, said he had done nothing to provoke the attack. "I was a farmer and preacher," he said. "I was not interested in politics."

Mr. Baltodano, 40 years old, said a unit of the Nicaraguan Army seized him and a friend early in February — he does not recall the exact date — while they were building a shelter for their families. He said the families were fleeing from fighting between



The New York Times / Paul Heston

Prudencio Baltodano saying he was tortured by the Sandinistas.

Government forces and rebels.

Mr. Baltodano said several of the soldiers tied him to a tree, warning him, "You don't know what we do to evangelical pastors. We are Communists and don't believe in God." Mr. Baltodano said he was a pastor in the United Pentecostal Mission, one of a number of evangelical groups in Nicaragua that have attracted a large following.

He said he did not know the identities of the soldiers who assaulted him, but said they came from a Nicaraguan Army unit.

Mr. Baltodano said that although he bled profusely from the wounds inflicted during torture, he was able to escape with difficulty through the forest when the soldiers departed.

Mr. Baltodano said he now lives in Costa Rica. Mr. Ferrey said that Mr. Baltodano would present his case to members of Congress and talk to officials from the United Nations and Organization of American States.